DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 088 187 EA 005 920

TITLE	Crisis Communications. Seminar Report.
INSTITUTION	New York State School Boards Association, Albany.
PUB DATE	73
NOTE	42p.; A collection of two New York State School Boards Association seminar presentations and support materials (April 30 and May 7, 1973)
AVAILABLE FROM	New York State School Boards Association, Inc., 111 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12210 ($3.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.85
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication Problems; Mass Media; *Negotiation Impasses; *Press Opinion; *Public Relations; *Strikes

ABSTRACT

Communicating effectively is seldom easy; it requires planning, effort, understanding, and follow-through. Communicating effectively in the tense atmosphere which often surrounds a crisis requires redoubled effort, greater understanding, and increased attention to proper planning. The presentations in this booklet deal with the needs of the media and the special communications requirements of a negotiations impasse or a strike. It examines other crises, such as that of an organized community protest of a particular decision. The materials are presented in the hopes that they will be of reference value to school boards faced with special communications problems. (Author)

SEMINAR
REPORT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 088187

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

This volume contains a collection of the
presentations and support materials used at the
April 30 and May 7 Seminars in 1973

EA 005 920

$3.00

NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION, INC.
111 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12210

CONTENTS

	Page
School Public Relations - An Essential Operation Jerome G. Kovalcik	1
What the Media Wants and How They Want It Martin Buskin; David G. Rossie	13
Communication Procedures During Negotiations Impasse or Strike ... Dr. Robert F. Savitt	23
Keeping Communications Lines Open During A Strike J. William Jones	29
Preparing for Crisis Communications With the News Media ... R. Seymour Smith	33

FOREWORD

Communicating effectively is seldom easy; it requires planning, effort, understanding, and follow-through. Communicating effectively in the tense atmosphere which often surrounds a crisis requires redoubled effort, greater understanding, and increased attention to proper planning.

The presentations in this booklet deal with the needs of the media, the special communications requirements of a negotiations impasse or a strike, and examines other crises, such as an organized community protest of a particular policy decision.

We believe these presentations, when taken together, provide a valuable reference for school boards faced with special communications problems. The presentations were made at two New York State School Boards Association's seminars held in May and June 1973.

DONALD G. BROSSMAN
Executive Director

JEROME G. KOVALCIK is assistant superintendent, education information services-public relations for the New York City Schools. A graduate of Canisius College he has been community superintendent, public relations officer, professor, executive secretary, consultant, speaker, and author. Mr. Kovalcik joined the New York City school system in 1958. He is a past president of the National School Public Relations Association and is involved with many state and national organizations in the educational communications field.

School Public Relations—An Essential Operation

The most important requisite for good public relations is consideration for others. If in formulating school board policies we think of how all our actions are going to affect our pupils and our fellow teachers, if we consider how that we do will affect the parents and the rest of the community, then we most certainly are on our way toward successful leadership in school-public relations.

Public relations is as some one said, "Hitching modern communications to good old fashioned horse sense". You know what good old fashioned horse sense is: It is the sense that a horse has not to bet on a man. Public relations is not gimmickry. It is not something that is made up just to engineer consensus, as one of our commercial public relations colleagues indicates. It is really a sincere wanting to involve the public in the operation of our schools. It is sincerely wanting to share the story of the schools with the public.

We must not practice alimony public relations, either. You know what alimony public relations is: It is wanting others to support us, but not wanting to live with them. To win public support for the public schools we must get parental and community involvement and really want to live with all members of our public, internal as well as external, adherents as well as critics. This is the essence of a good school-community relations program. We must try to incorporate our school communities into the very existence of the schools. We must not make decisions without consultation with parents and others who have a stake in our schools. We must draw them into the very making of decisions.

Fortunately most citizens want good education for their children. They depend on school people for the steady flow of facts and ideas which will help them to understand the kinds of moral and financial support that must be provided.

It is necessary for the public to understand the work being performed by the schools in order to give intelligent cooperation and consideration to school affairs. Yet many parents have little information on which to base their efforts.

School public relations is not a one-way communications system. Not only must the public be informed about its schools, but school authorities must be constantly aware of the problems, needs, and goals of the public. Unless school officials confide in parents and others in regard to the needs, problems, and objectives of the schools, it is doubtful that the understanding and support necessary for the successful operation of the schools will be forthcoming.

Troublesome times are ahead for those persons concerned with the education of our youth. Education will cost more with each succeeding year. Can it be expected that the taxpayers will continue to bear the heavy load of financing the schools if they are not fully aware of what their dollars are buying? No district can afford to be complacent about public relations.

Public relations is a combination of the following ideas and practices.

A way of life expressed daily by each person on the school staff in his relations with other staff members, pupils, parents, and people in the community — in short, good human relations.

Systematic, honest, and continuing series of activities for educating people to the purposes of the school, its program, problems, and accomplishments.

Systematic, honest, and continuing series of activities for finding out what parents and other people in the community think about their schools and what they want their schools to provide for children.

An active partnership between the school and community, in which professional educators and laymen work together for essential modifications and improvements in the educational program.

By what criteria can we judge a good public relations program?

Accuracy of reporting must be an established feature of any public relations effort — complete, truthful. Democratic social institutions must be established upon the confidence of the people, which in turn depends upon the honesty and sincerity of instructional functioning.

School public relations must be intrinsic. The public relations effort must not have an identity extrinsic to the program which is being conducted in the schools. The public relations program should be neither an apology for what is lacking in the school program nor a sales effort to promote what is not fundamentally wanted by school patrons. People should be told what is good about their schools, where they are weak, existing problems and how they can be improved.

It is natural for people to judge any service or product in terms of what they consider its value. They appraise education primarily in terms of service they believe it provides their children. This means that the accomplishments, successes, acquired knowledge and skills of pupils must be continuously shown.

It is unreasonable to expect people to provide support for existing school programs or to devise improved ones unless they recognize the values they receive.

School public relations must be continuous. It takes everyday contacts, through months and years, to condition the public for support. There must be a steady program of public information concerning purposes, efforts, and achievement of the school and a guarantee that parents will participate regularly in the planning and improving of educational efforts. A single message is likely to be forgotten because of the variety of stimuli with which people are constantly being confronted.

School public relations must be comprehensive. School public relations programs must be wide and diversified. All phases of the school program must be incorporated and all members of the staff are included. All possible methods of contacts with any public must be utilized.

Comprehensiveness means that publics should be given the complete story of the schools in action through a balanced presentation of factual information pertaining to the total educational enterprise. School information should have proper balance. Each aspect of the school program should receive its proper share of information. School public relations should extend to every community group within the school district.

Because no one medium reaches all people, it is necessary to repeat a message through the utilization of various media in order to arouse greater interest and public discussion.

A suggestion carried by mass media plus face to face reinforcement is more likely to be accepted than a suggestion carried by either alone, other things being equal.

School public relations must be sensitive to its publics. Too many school officials consider public relations as exclusively publicity. Public relations must include two-way channels of communication.

A public relations program must be adapted to the community it serves.

Ideas communicated must be simple. Presentation of ideas must be clear and interesting — simple definitions, summarized conceptions, simple narrative, musical brevity of language, and personified abstraction.

School Public Relations Is a Family Affair

Many agents and media must be utilized. Every member of the school family is a public relations agent — for good or bad. The school board and superintendent of schools have the chief responsibility. In addition, there are principals, business officers, supervisors, teachers, secretaries, nurses, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and all other school employees. If each of these persons accepts the obligation of fulfilling his role in the public relations program, the school district has a good program.

The variety of public relations agents can be seen from a listing of the various public relations instruments and media — student newspapers, magazines and annuals, community newspapers, school house organs, teachers handbooks, student handbooks, annual and special reports, school bulletins, letters to parents and pupils, report cards, courses of study, pupil exhibits, photographs, graphs, slides, films, television, school plants, speeches, discussion, social contacts.

Responsibilities of Each Member of School Family

The school board is the policy making body of the school district. It provides liaison between the people of the community and the professional staff. It represents many segments of the public. Boards should have written policies on public relations. The very emphasis on importance of school public relations will foster community understanding.

School board functioning in public relations includes open meetings, participation in discussion groups, appointment of advisory commissions, polls of public opinion, personal contacts, contact with groups.

The superintendent of schools executes public relations policy. Moreover, the tone he sets in his every day contacts with school personnel and the public does much toward shaping their attitudes. He delegates public relations responsibilities to principals, teachers, and other personnel. If possible, he delegates the public relations coordination to a professionally trained public relations specialist.

Principals are the directors of public relations for their schools. Because of his many contacts in the community, the principal is usually well known by many parents and other citizens. How he conducts himself in and out of the school situation will determine the effectiveness of his public relations efforts. Internally, if he has a democratic administration and if he involves staff in decision making, he will make for good public relations.

The teacher — of all the agents for public relations — is the one person who must be considered unconditionally indispensable. His every day conduct in relations with the children determine the way in which the parents regard both him and the school. The success of the school is determined by the teachers in it, and there is no place in the schools of today for an inadequate teacher. A good public opinion of the schools cannot long endure without the reputation for instructional adequacy.

Teachers cannot escape their public relations roles — they are basic. Their every day contacts with pupils, parents, and others in the community can lead to public relations of the most desirable sort.

The attitudes of teachers can be reflected in the attitudes of pupils and parents. It is important that this attitude be a positive one. Teachers who are happy, satisfied, and secure are likely to develop these feelings within their pupils.

Teachers comprise the largest number of agents in any school public relations program. Because of their large numbers, their two-way, face-to-face contacts with citizens far exceed that of any other single agent. Parents are naturally interested in the specific achievements and difficulties of their children. The most efficient means whereby they can get this information is through conversations with teachers.

The teacher must have the complete knowledge and understanding of each child and of the home and family background from which he comes. Because of this strategic position of the teacher, he becomes the focal point of attention from the home and the community.

It is important that teachers make certain their pupils completely understand the reasons for the work that they are expected to do in school. This practice makes possible a more accurate interpretation of the children's work to parents and other adults.

Usually the attitude of pupils towards teachers will be positive when the teachers are fair in managing their classrooms and when they respect the views and dignity of the pupils. A mutual understanding and positive attitude toward teachers may result in later years in strong support of the schools by pupils when they reach adulthood.

It is important that teachers maintain good colleague relationships. Good professional treatment of each other helps teachers become better public relations agents. Irresponsible criticism of each other generates dissension which in turn impedes effective work.

Teachers should take active part in community life. Through this participation the people can get to know their teachers better. They can begin to look upon the teachers as human beings just as they themselves are.

Nonteaching personnel consists of many individuals — custodians, cafeteria workers, transportation and maintenance workers, secretarial personnel, and other kinds of clerical employees. There are professional people too — doctors, dentists, psychiatrists, nurses, architects, accountants, and lawyers.

The cross section of nonteaching personnel in the schools is the most neglected in the entire field of school public relations. Not only are they relatively unrecognized within the school for their contributions to facilitate in the instructional program, but they are also relatively unknown and unrecognized as school personnel by the community outside the school.

This oversight must be corrected if the school public relations program is to provide complete information to all segments of the community. Neglecting such a significant group as the nonteaching employees creates a gap in school contacts with the people and thereby causes a weakness in the program. If school officials wish noninstructional employees to be good public relations agents they must make certain that these employees are efficient and happy in their work.

As an example of the importance of the noninstructional employee, consider the school custodian. The school custodian is a very important school employee and is one of the most potent agents in the public relations program. With the rapidly growing tendency towards making the school plant a community center, the importance of a school custodian has been rapidly increasing. Unfortunately, however, school officials often overlook the importance of the custodian in the public relations program. The custodian is usually uninformed or misinformed about school matters.

Few school employees have more personal contacts in the school and community than the custodian. He is often a person who has lived for many years in the community, and whether school officials approve of it or not, the custodian is an influential public relations agent for good or for ill. The custodian sees and hears much concerning the school in his every day work, and he is in a position to say much and quite frequently does so. What he says to his friends, neighbors, and associates is very often accepted as factual. It is therefore extremely important that he be accurately and completely informed about school matters.

The importance of the school doctor, the dentist, the nurse, and the psychiatrist must not be overlooked. The association these people have with children, parents, and members of their respective organizations provides them the opportunity to pass along to others the changing concepts of the needs for their services and the understanding of the policies, practices, and philosophies of the school in relation to these services. They are also in a position to talk about other aspects of the school program as well. School authorities must make sure that they are kept fully informed.

The school district cannot intelligently overlook or discount the potential role of any of its personnel as school public relations agents. The secretary, for example, is a very important agent. There is a public relations job for every member of the school system to do — a job that is an integral part of his daily work.

Pupils also are important public relations agents. The pupils live in a home, have parents or guardians, and make contacts with some community groups in the community in which they live. When the number of such contacts is realized, the pupil is recognized clearly as a very important agent in school community relations. The attitudes of the members of his home are influenced considerably by what the pupil says and does regarding the school. Therefore, what the pupil is, thinks, and does should be of great concern to those conducting a school public relations program.

In many communities the pupil is the only channel of communication between school and parents — usually due to apathy on the part of the parents in seeking out information about schools from other sources.

What pupils think of the staff members of the school and of what goes on in the school is well known in all neighborhoods of a community. Schools will always be a main topic of conversation among children. What they say depends upon their confidence in and respect for the personnel. Pupils who feel they belong, who like the school, the principal, the teachers, the custodians, and other personnel will constitute one of the most effective means for satisfactory home and community contacts.

As mentioned earlier, school officials would be remiss if they did not attempt to develop in pupils a positive basis for future support of the schools. The school should do everything possible to make clear to the pupils the reasons for education and its role in our culture. Thus far, we have talked about those agents for school public relations who are part of the immediate school family — the board, the superintendent of schools, his staff, both teaching and nonteaching, and the pupils. The community itself — including citizens advisory groups, parent-teacher associations, or other organized groups, youth organizations, the churches, government agencies, etc., should also be drawn into the public relations partnership.

Parent-teacher associations in most communities have long played a major and constructive role in school-citizen cooperation. The concept of close partnership between parents and teachers gives the PTA an inherent strength in school public relations.

Properly administered and governed, the local association of the PTA provides a medium through which parents and teachers may become better acquainted. It gives parents the opportunity of achieving a better understanding of the school and of its purposes, policies, and programs. It enables teachers to gain a clearer insight into the community. The local PTA can serve as an agency for the distribution of information about the schools and can aid in the development of public opinion in support of the schools.

A carefully planned and dynamic PTA program geared to the specific objectives of the association is a must. Teachers must have a positive attitude towards the PTA and must devote as much time and effort as is possible in support of the PTA.

Other Groups

Even when education is not the major interest of other organized community groups they have, when effectively motivated, sponsored study councils, scholarships, career days, hobby shows, business-education days, and sports events. They have worked with school employment offices and helped promote bond issues.

It is important that school officials maintain a friendly and cooperative relationship with those community groups who indicate an interest in the welfare of children — service clubs, civic groups, civil rights groups, and fraternal groups.

Local government relationships with public schools makes a cooperative relationship necessary. It is good public relations for administrative and professional personnel of schools to be active in initiating projects with juvenile court, police court, district library, fire department, and recreation authorities.

We should not overlook the importance of political organizations. We need to be strictly nonpartisan in our relations with them but we certainly can be friendly and communicative.

In brief then, we will have good public relations for our schools if every member of the school family understands that the schools belong to the public; that consideration for others and sincerity in dealing with the public are essential; that good human relations must be one of the components of good public relations; that communications must be a two-way process; and that parents and other members of the public must be involved in decision making. Of course, each member of the school family must live according to these understandings.

57 Varieties of School-Community Relations Hints

On December 7, 1972, approximately 50 members of Community School District staffs, whose responsibilities primarily pertain to school-community or school public relations attended the regular monthly invitational one-day institute sponsored by the school board's Office of Education Information Services and Public Relations and asked themselves in small group discussions "What can be done to improve public understanding and support of our schools". At the conclusion of the institute they came up with 57 recommendations. These recommendations will be the basis of detailed discussions at future institutes. In the meantime, these proposals are offered to all who are interested in our schools for their consideration and possible action. The participants in the institutes understand that many of the recommendations are already in operation in some of the districts and schools. They felt, however, that the totality of school-community relations throughout the entire city is an important factor in any effort to gain public understanding and support — and that principles of good school-community relations should be followed by all schools and districts as well as by the centralized school operations.

1. Every community school board should publicly approve a school-community relations or public relations or public communication policy.

2. All community superintendents should consult regularly at least once a month with presidents of the parents associations in their districts — sharing ideas, problems, and progress, seeking their advice and generally developing a partnership with them.

3. All community school boards should set up community advisory committees to assist them in the governance of the districts.

4. All community superintendents should establish an "open door" policy including the installation and operation of an open line telephone; invitation to community residents to visit the district office; setting up of exhibits and displays in the district; et cetera.

5. In order to obtain feedback about the schools from the community, district, and school staff members should be encouraged to attend meetings in the community and listen to comments and views about schools — a Listener's Bureau in every district and school.

6. In-service educational training programs in human relations, sensitivity training and group dynamics should be provided for teachers and parents together.

7. An advisory committee on budget needs should be established on a continuous basis.

8. All districts should utilize as effectively as possible mass media communications — newspapers, newsletters, etc. — to make the communities more keenly aware of district programs, special events, other achievements, and problems.

9. Committees should be formed to plan and implement district-wide forums on important educational issues.

10. There should be an expansion of district-wide programs involving children in special events, e.g., field days and athletics, exhibits, art and poetry contests, spelling bees, et cetera.

11. Every community school district office and every school should have on its staff at least one person trained in community relations in order to reach out into the community and assist teachers, para-professionals, supervisors, and other staff members in their roles in the overall community relations program.

12. Brochures should be prepared by coordinators of all special and funded programs and distributed to all parents.

13. Every school should have a "family room" where parents and staff can intermingle and where a "cup of coffee" is always available.

14. There should be district-wide participation in festivities and holidays to foster unity and a spirit of community in the district.

15. Members of the staff should be encouraged to eat lunch with pupils.

16. Every school should have a School Committee or a Steering Committee composed of parents, teachers, community representatives and pupils, which would meet regularly at least once a month during school hours in order to anticipate and solve school problems.

17. The federal guidelines on the involvement of parents and others in the planning of funded programs should be followed by every district and the central offices.

18. Community school districts and schools should utilize resources in the community in the conduct of their activities and should inform parents, staff, and students about these resources.

19. Community school board meetings should be utilized as a means for informing parents and others about programs, problems, funding, and all other school-related activities.

20. All new school personnel should receive orientation training with special attention to the knowledge of the community and particular school needs.

21. School personnel should participate in an inter-visitation program within and outside of the school district.

22. Parent leadership should be developed through parents' glee clubs, talent shows, participation in teacher training sessions, visits to schools in their own as well as in other districts, the preparation of proposals for funded programs, membership on advisory committees, enrollment in continuing education and workshops, et cetera.

23. Parents should be encouraged to be active in schools as teacher aides, helpers in security programs, assistants in lunchrooms and libraries, assistants to guidance counselors, and as assistants to school personnel in emergencies.

24. Parents should be included in pupil field trips to trade centers, hospitals, colleges, museums, et cetera.

25. An Educational Resource Center should be set up in every district where parents can become acquainted with instructional materials used by their children.

26. There should be district-wide conferences as well as orientation sessions with community agencies.

27. District-wide questionnaires should be utilized by community school districts to learn what parents, students, and staff feel about education in the district.

28. District and school staffs should join with the community in such projects as beautification of the neighborhood, improvement in police and fire protection, and health services.

29. Political leaders should be invited to meetings concerning the district and its schools and their programs.

30. Clergy of all denominations should be invited to participate in district and school programs and activities.

31. There should be close articulation between the operation of day care centers and the schools.

32. Schools should put on book fairs, art exhibits, and musical performances in streets and parks.

33. The program of every school or district meeting to which parents and other community residents are invited should include a major social feature — a "fiesta" mixed in with serious business.

34. Invitations to all school functions should be distributed to all parents.

35. There should be greater parent participation in school assembly programs.

36. More frequent and varied school meetings should be arranged for parents: grade meetings, class mothers, class fathers, et cetera.

37. Each school should organize a Fathers Club, a Grandparents Club, and Senior Citizen parties.

38. There should be greater intercommunication between the junior high schools and their feeder schools on all levels: students, staff, parents.

39. The central school board should hold some of its meetings outside of 110 Livingston Street in Brooklyn — in other boroughs, in other places.

40. Each school should have a telephone "hot line" for parents and others to handle rumors, complaints, et cetera.

41. A "suggestion box" should be installed in every school and students, staff, and parents should be invited to contribute.

42. Either in addition to, or in the place of, faculty meetings, every school should hold a "school family" meeting at least once a month with all professional and nonprofessional staff members, student representatives, and parent representatives in attendance.

43. Emphasis should be on "our school" instead of "my school".

44. Parents should be invited by school staff on a regular basis for breakfast or lunch at the school.

45. Each school should hold an "Assessment Day" at the end of a school year, when the principal and staff would render an account of strengths and weaknesses of the school to the parents.

46. All community school districts and schools should strive to improve internal communication.

47. Para-professionals should be included in all planning by the professional staff.

48. Parents should be encouraged to hold "parlor meetings" in their homes for small groups of their neighbors to discuss their schools, with school representatives invited to attend as resource persons.

49. Greater attendance and more active participation at parent association meetings should be promoted in many different ways: maximum publicity disseminated in every place in community where parents go; social feature at all meetings; children's programs at meetings; alternating meetings — day and evening; interpreters at meetings for parents who do not understand English; baby-sitting services for parents attending meetings; safety patrol and other escort service for parents attending meetings at night; et cetera.

50. Parent association presidents should be invited to attend some of the monthly principals' conferences held in the districts.

51. Principals and other staff members should be invited by parents associations to attend some of their meetings.

52. Develop a "Welcome Wagon" concept and procedure for new parents, students, and teachers.

53. Students should be invited as resource persons for staff training institutes on school-community relations.

54. Community school districts and schools should form student advertising and public relations companies designed to provide information and promote the image of the school.

55. School-community relations conferences, seminars, and institutes should be conducted for all categories of members of the school family: students, teachers, para-professionals, parents, supervisors, et cetera.

56. Community school districts should distribute to schools a publication giving advice concerning ways to improve school-community relations.

57. Community school district staff persons assigned to foster school-community relations should arrange to meet on a regular basis with all members of the school family either in their offices or in schools to discuss topics dealing with school-community relations.

DAVID G. ROSSIE is education editor for the *Binghamton Evening Press* and the *Sunday Press*. A graduate of State University College of New York at Cortland, he has been a reporter and sports writer joining the *Press* in 1968. Mr. Rossie has participated in many school-community information programs throughout the State.

MARTIN BUSKIN is education editor for *Newsday*. A graduate of New York University he worked for a radio news service prior to joining *Newsday* in 1953. Mr. Buskin is a past president of the Education Writers Association and has won numerous national awards for his education writing. He has also written articles for state and national educational magazines and appeared on many communications workshop programs.

What the Media Want and How They Want It

Let me begin with a proverb of sorts, a throwback to my school German: School boards that behave as if they have a lot to hide usually do.

What I am getting at is that after eight years of education writing and covering school boards and of late covering Public Employment Relations Board improper practice hearings, I am constantly amazed at the knack some school boards have for making things difficult for themselves.

Before any of you tell me, and properly so, that it is one thing to stand on the sidelines and evaluate what is going on and something else to be engaged at close quarters, let me say that I agree with you. You are quite right. That, I submit, makes the sideline observer's evaluation the more valuable.

If any of you have ever played football or lacrosse or any fast moving, violent contact sport you will recall that your recollection of a game generally boiled down to how it went between you and the man or men playing opposite you.

If you were doing your job, that was all you really had time for. By the same token, a combat rifleman's grasp of a battle in which he is involved is usually confined to what is happening in his immediate front and for about ten yards to either side. The batallion commander flying overhead in an observation plane or dug in on a commanding height to the rear has a far clearer — not to mention safer — study of what is going on.

So it is comparatively easy for a reporter, who can usually talk to both sides in a dispute more freely than can one of the contending numbers, one to another, to evaluate a situation. The subject I was given to talk about was entitled "What the Media Want and How They Want It".

I cannot speak for the rest of the media. In fact, I cannot speak for most of my colleagues. I can only tell you what I want and how I want it. You must judge the merits of my position. Briefly put, what I want is two-fold: I want the truth, to the extent that it can be given to me without it being damaging, and along with it I want the trust of the giver that I will use it judiciously and in certain instances sparingly. In a few rare cases not at all.

Some of my colleagues boast of the stories they have dug out and written against all kinds of pleading and in some cases threats to stop the story. I have had some of these and I will admit it is heady stuff, particularly where it meant having the last word against an overbearing and hostile subject. Make no mistake, anyone who tells you a good reporter never allows his personal feelings to affect his writing is either a liar or a fool, or both.

Ideally, I suppose it should not happen, but it will continue until we find a substitute for a human reporter. Many times this can mean nothing more than a story more colorful and more intently pursued than one in which the reporter has only a passing interest. In this case, the reporter's strong feelings actually make for a better story.

Unfortunately a reporter's passion, his advocacy, can cause him to throw objectivity and factuality over the side entirely. This is what we try to avoid, all of us who take pride in our work that is. At this point some of you may be saying to yourselves, "Spiro Agnew was right after all. Here is one of them admitting it". As a matter of fact, Mr. Agnew was right — up to a point — slanting news stories is reprehensible. So is lying to reporters and to the American public, I might add.

Regrettably, Mr. Agnew's distaste for what he calls slanted news stories seems to be confined to those he feels fail to acknowledge the divinity of the Nixon administration, such papers as the New York Times and the Washington Post. The steady listing to starboard of such journals as the New York Daily News and the Chicago Tribune seem to bother Mr. Agnew not at all.

What I am getting at is the sad truth that any reporter who tries to do his job is going to make somebody unhappy. A reporter, education writers included, has to decide early on which way he is going to go in covering his beat.

A very few try the approach that owes its existence to the writers of bad fiction or television situation comedies. They are the ones who try to take their beats by storm, threatening to expose any who dare think of hiding anything from them. Happily, these characters either change quickly or disappear. Most reporters fall into one of two other categories.

There is the advocate who decides that the best way to get along with the powerful news sources on his beat is to find out what their needs are and then try to serve them. Before you turn up your noses at this obsequious approach, let me tell you that it can be a very comfortable way to get along particularly if you have editors who are themselves anxious to please the "establishment", if I may be permitted one use of that overused word, and who are also more concerned with getting a story first than they are with getting it accurately and fully developed.

In a situation like this, a reporter trades off his objectivity for a guaranteed beat on all major stories that might develop. Unfortunately — for the readers not for the reporter — he soon becomes little more than an extension of the person or agency he is supposed to be covering. Never is heard a discouraging word about the men or machinations he is supposedly watching as the public's eyes and ears.

On some newspapers this can be a swift and painless path upward. I say painless because somewhere along the way the reporter so inclined has had to cash in his sensitivity and his conscience and whatever may have been left of his integrity. Personally, I would rather sell encyclopedias door-to-door.

I prefer what I call, for want of a better word, the adversary approach. I like to think that I do not approach a news source as an enemy. I do want him to know, though, that I come as a skeptic. I am willing to be convinced, but I am not willing to sit still and be snowed.

I have no letters of testament with me, but I can tell you that I have never knowingly betrayed a news source. That is not to say I have never gone to the mat with some of them. I have taken a few shots and I have given some, but always in the open. A while back I said that I want the trust of those with whom I must engage from day-to-day.

When a news source gives me material for a good story I am, naturally, grateful to that source, but in a sense I am even more grateful to a source who trusts me to the extent that he or she will tell me in so many words, "Look, this is the way things are and this is what we hope to do. If you write about it now you could wreck the whole thing. If you will accept this information as background, to be kept confidential until the time is right for its publication, you will be doing another kind of public service".

I have agreed to some proposals of this kind and rejected others when I mistrusted their motives. I must admit that the times I waited — sat on a story if you will — I do not believe the reading public was done any disservice. Sometimes a reporter, in digging for a story, will come on something quite by accident, something that public exposure at that time could destroy.

If it is something that needs destroying, then all well and good. It is of such stuff that Pulitzer prizes are won, but just as often premature exposure can prove fatal to something that should have been allowed to grow and strengthen before being exposed to the light.

At such times a reporter must, whether he likes it or not, play God in a minor way.

Let there be no misunderstanding between us. I know and you know that your jobs as school board members would be simpler, probably, if newspaper reporters never came to your meetings, never poked into your academic closets, never asked all those smart aleck questions. What further complicates the matter is our inability to cover school matters equally and consistently.

Most newspapers never have enough reporters on hand to cover all the things that need to be covered within a given 24-hour period and invariably, in the case of school districts, the small districts tend to get low priority rankings, except — and this is where the pinch comes — when controversy develops. Then the men and women who run these districts can only wonder, with justification I might add, what hit them. Just like that they go from obscurity to page-lead status over night.

I had one such experience I will never forget. It involved a contract dispute between a small town school board and its teachers association. A dispute that deepened as summer lengthened, and was still unresolved when school reopened in September.

There was talk of a strike and on the day before school was to resume, the teachers called a public meeting to air their grievances. I attended and wrote a story about the meeting. Two nights later the school board called a meeting of its own and packed it with citizens sympathetic to its cause.

I went to that meeting too, and was met at the door by the school board president, a genuine Neanderthal. A man who literally owned the town and one who had declared publicly a few days earlier that had he been negotiating with those damned teachers he would have done his negotiating with a pick handle.

The place was awash with good will. Anyway, the board president made it clear to me that while we were in a public building, I was less than welcome. "What we are doing here is none of your damn newspaper's business", he told me. "This is a No-Name-School matter, not a Binghamton matter, so why don't you leave."

The name of the place, I should mention here, was not No-Name-School, but that would not be a bad name for it if they wanted to change. Anyway, the man was dead wrong in thinking our newspaper had no business there. It is a newspaper's business to be wherever public affairs are taking place, furthermore my newspaper sells several hundred papers daily and Sunday in that school district.

The man was dead right in another respect. I had never been inside a building in that district until two days before, and it had taken controversy to get me there. I had no excuse for that shortcoming then and I have none now.

I have tried to see that it does not happen now, though. As education editor I try to impress on those who cover school matters with me the importance of establishing an identity with the people on whom they must rely for information about the workings of their districts.

I have prepared a guide of sorts that each school reporter gets and I have made a copy available to George Lowe for duplication and distribution to you if you are interested in having one.

My own relations with school board members and school administrators are most satisfactory in districts where I have made an effort to get to know them as men and women, not simply disembodied voices on a telephone, or signatures at the bottom of a directive. I have hunted and fished with some of these men, dined with them, drank with them, traded stories with them, and in the long run developed a better understanding of them, their problems, and their aspirations.

Now I am not saying that we have to organize playdays between reporters and board members or superintendents of schools in order for them to be understanding. There are many school men — administrators and board members — with whom I have a good working relationship but not a shred of common interest beyond education.

On the other hand, there are schoolmen who share my passion for fly fishing and hunting and who would love nothing better than to take me hunting — and come back alone. All I am saying is that there is no reason for us to be forever sizing one another up, circling one another warily like a couple of stray cats trying to stake our a territory, and one waiting to catch the other off balance.

Who gains from such a relationship? Not the public we are both pledged to serve.

More about trust. It cannot be an on-again, off-again thing. As far as I am concerned, an arrangement whereby a source — whether it is a school board, a teachers association, or an individual representing one or the other — trusts me up to a point and then shuts me off when it no longer serves his or its purpose to be open with me is an unacceptable arrangement.

Newspapermen have pride. We do not like to be used at the pleasure of the user. Why mince words. We are not, after all, whores and we do not like to be treated as such. I have argued this position with school boards and with teachers associations. If it is any consolation, I have found teachers associations can be quite as unreasonable, from our point of view that is, as the ficklest school board.

The question I guess you must resolve is this: Will you help or hinder your school district by cooperating with the local news media?

Strike the word local from that, if you will. Too often, I have found, school boards in small towns will try to withhold information from a metropolitan newspaper such as mine on the grounds that they are saving the story for a local weekly.

For good reason: weeklies, relying for sustenance on local advertisers who may also serve on school boards, are generally far more docile, more likely to print "authorized" stories, than are the more remote dailies. If my weekly newspaper colleagues think this is unfair, I am sorry. It happens to be the case nine times out of ten.

I happen to believe that press coverage can be a positive force for a school board.

A few years ago the board of cooperative educational services that serves the county in which I live and work decided to undertake a massive building program in order to consolidate its fragmented operations. It needed approval of the voters in its component districts and to get that approval it had to sell its programs to those voters — programs many of them knew nothing about unless they had children enrolled in BOCES classes.

Some of the BOCES board members and administrators asked me to visit their classes and then write about the program if I thought it was worth a story. I spent a week visiting the various BOCES operations and came away with material not for a story but for a series of stories. The referendum was held, the building program was approved, and now BOCES has a splendid new campus.

The board members and administrators who asked me to look at their program had no idea at the time what I would write, but they believed in their programs and they were willing to gamble that the programs could stand the light of examination.

They told me afterward that they thought my series had made the difference between voter approval and rejection. Personally I doubt it, although I would be less than human if I did not admit that it was fun for a change to be credited with something instead of being blamed for something.

The fact is, I simply wrote about what I saw and what various BOCES administrators and teachers told me of what they were doing, what they wanted to do, and the obstacles they were meeting along the way.

Some of the things they said irritated administrators in the component districts, but at the same time they alerted the voters of those districts to the needs that existed. Had the BOCES people played it safe and hedged with me, the public would have learned less than it did. It is not my purpose here today to talk to you as a Dutch uncle, but let me give you just a few examples of the kind of things that produce needless polarizations between the press and school boards.

Recently a school board, with which we have had a good working relationship, hired a new superintendent to succeed one who is retiring next month after a long and exemplary career. The man the board hired is from a small town in our circulation area and we have had equally good relations with him. Yet, when the board president announced the man's appointment, he refused to tell our reporter what the new superintendent's salary would be.

The reporter then called the new superintendent and asked him. He, too, refused. He took the position that his salary was none of our business and that if any taxpayer in the district wanted to know what it was he could go to the school district business office and look it up in the board minutes. Our reporter protested, in vain, that the man's salary was a matter of public record. He also pointed out that it was Saturday night and the business office was not open. I think you can guess what happened next.

On Monday I went to the district office and got the man's salary figure from the board minutes. Then I called a source in the district where the man is now working and got his current salary. That afternoon the man's salary, which would have been worth perhaps a half-dozen words buried in the original story of his appointment, was the subject of a separate story that ran to six inches.

Overkill, you might say, and maybe you are right. The point is it all could have been avoided because the people involved should have known what our reaction was going to be. Try to keep something from a newspaper — especially something it has a right to have — and that newspaper will move heaven and earth to get it.

Elsewhere in our circulation area there is a school district that is trying to dig out from under a ruinous 27-day strike last fall by its teachers' association. PERB hearings of improper practice charges have been going on in Syracuse intermittently since January and there is no end in sight.

Certainly, it takes two sides to produce a strike. I will not dwell in this talk on that strike, its causes, and its aftermath, although I will do my best to answer questions about it based on my observations of it afterward. Let me say this though: It is my belief that the actions of the majority of the school board involved made a strike if not inevitable at least highly predictable.

One anecdote will serve to set the mood that exists between the board and my paper.

A few weeks ago this board, without warning, fired two veteran teachers who had participated in the strike. The board's method of firing the teachers appears to have been illegal, but that is for the courts to decide and it is immaterial to what I am talking about. Beyond announcing the firings the board and its administrators refused all comment. The teachers and their association officers, as you might imagine, had plenty to say.

Two of us — another reporter and myself — worked on the story the next day, trying to get the board-administration point of view to balance the teachers' stories. The superintendent, as usual, was unavailable. The board president refused to return

my several telephone calls to his office. So, with regrets we wrote stories that presented the teachers' reactions and speculations and we told of our failure to get from the administrators and board members the information that might have balanced the story. A few days later I met the board president at one of the previously mentioned PERB sessions. He is a good man, a kind man, and I think the strike and its aftermath have been overwhelming to him.

He was hurt by what had happened. "You printed a one-sided story", he told me and there was honest concern in his voice. "I know we did", I told him, "but not because we wanted to. I called you several times and you did not return my calls". "I was at work", he told me. I told him I knew that and then I asked him if I had succeeded in getting through to him whether he would have talked to me about the case. No, he would not be replied. Well, then, I told him, it really did not matter that I had tried to call him.

That was right, he told me, but I was missing his point. His point was that since the board was taking a "no comment" stance we should have written nothing at all about the matter since both sides of the story were not available. I tell you this only because I believe this "let's not look at it and maybe it will go away" syndrome is not an isolated thing.

You, the New York State School Boards Association, are facing one of the best organized and certainly the largest single employee organization in the State of New York. If you have mobilized your force to face these legions it has escaped my notice and that of most of my colleagues. You are going to have to, if you have not already and until you do — after you do, for that matter — you should not dissipate your energies by battling with the press.

I am not looking at the New York State United Teachers and the New York State School Boards Association and saying, "Let's you and him fight; because it will make great copy". I say to you what I have said to them: That if there can be more openness between your two organizations, then perhaps there can be greater understanding. Misunderstanding, like a mushroom, flourishes in the dark.

We newspaper people do not seek to take sides in your seeming confrontation with NYSUT. I would like to think that we would rather see it resolved. For our stake in a better educated public is surely as great as yours.

We are only now beginning to see, as the lid comes off the shameful Watergate situation — the lid pulled off, I cannot help adding, by reporters who were vilified every step of the way — what can happen when a group of individuals decides it can deceive the public, lie to it, with impunity. Don't misunderstand me. I am not suggesting a comparison.

The fact that your organization is concerned enough to hold meetings such as this belies such a comparison.

I only fear that just as strife and misunderstanding has built a wall between one school board and my newspaper, so, conceivably could greater strife and broader misunderstanding create a wall between your organization and the press in general.

We do not want that and I am sure you do not either. I do not think it is an oversimplification to say we need each other. I think we can each make the other's job easier.

What it comes down to, I guess, is that I, for one, would rather work with you than against you. I hope you feel that same way about us.

What Is So Special About School District Coverage?

School districts, not including city school districts, are the only remaining municipalities that must still submit their budgets to the electorate for approval. They carry the democratic process one step farther than town, city, state, and federal governments. For that reason, as well as others, we should be vitally interested in what they are doing because our mission, we like to remind one another, is a well-informed public.

How important is school district coverage in relation to your other reportorial duties?

You may, with good reason, regard the school district or two that you are asked to cover as one more task on an already heavy duty list. Ask yourself this: How important is the school district coverage you provide to the people who read this newspaper?

Consider this: Except for sports, there is probably no single area we cover that commands a broader general interest than education. People with children are interested in stories about education. People without children are also interested in education because they, too, must help support the educational system.

Where Do You Come In?

Your obligation is to learn as much as you can about the school district to which you are assigned.

You should develop a general knowledge of the district: its physical location, enrollment, type of district (superintendency or district principal arrangement), location of its school buildings, and a working knowledge of its history. This last can usually be gleaned from our files.

You should know how often the district's school board meets, where, and at what time of day.

You should make it your business to meet the chief school administrator, as many board members as possible, the administrative assistants such as assistant superintendents for business and instruction, building principals, if possible, in short anyone who might someday make the difference between our getting a story and missing one.

Obviously, we cannot cover every school board meeting that takes place in our circulation area, but we can do our best to keep abreast of what is happening in these areas.

If you have spent much time among the outlying districts, you have probably at least once been met with this complaint from administrators or board members or both: "Why is it you people (the press) don't know we're alive out here until we have some trouble? Then you come rushing in."

It is an unpleasant question, the more so because, regrettably, there is a

degree of truth to it in many cases. We do have a tendency to treat the smaller districts with, to steal Daniel Moynihan's phrase, "benign neglect".

This changes when something controversial grabs our attention: the Shraga case in Greene, the Gilbertsville flap, the Whitney Point squabble between the teachers and Les Strong come immediately to mind.

In situations like this we move in, bring sudden and, in most instances, unwanted coverage to the district's affairs. The result is a relationship that is uncooperative at best, hostile at worst.

Obviously, we cannot eliminate this problem, entirely; and obviously we are not going to eliminate it by pretending not to notice an unpleasant situation that might develop in an outlying district.

We can lessen the shock of that kind of encounter if we have already established an understanding of sorts with the district's officials. By convincing them that we are genuinely interested in the affairs of the district — the mundane as well as the bizarre — we can or should be able to establish an atmosphere of trust.

If you can manage it, you should try to cover a board meeting in person from time to time. You might come away with a story good enough to justify the overtime or you might not.

The important thing is that you will have left the school people with the feeling that you were interested enough in the affairs of their district to come to a meeting. From that point on you are no longer a disembodied voice on the telephone. For that matter neither is the school official with whom you have been dealing. The good will you build by these personal visits can have a lasting effect, too.

You might also consider paying an unofficial visit to the chief school administrator some time. Perhaps take him out to lunch. Sure, it's a chamber of commerce-type approach, but it can't hurt your relationship any. Schoolmen get tired of talking to other schoolmen all the time. They like to get away from shop talk and you can sometimes cement a relationship simply by showing them you enjoy being with them.

If all this smacks of Dale Carnegie, it isn't meant to. Nor is it meant to be cynical. It simply means that by extending the amenities and courtesies we generally reserve for politicians to school people, we are helping ourselves.

Do not wait for the school people to call you with information. You take the initiative. Call from time-to-time just to see what is going on. Usually there will be nothing, but you are keeping your hand in.

Remember, too, that not all good stories originate from within the corporate structure of the school. Some of the best school stories we have come up with have been called to our attention by parents and others living in the school district. This happened because the reader had come to identify the reporter with the school district and consequently knew who to call. Readers are more likely to call in a story idea if they can ask for a specific reporter.

To make certain your school district's meetings do not pass unnoticed, develop the habit of writing same-day advances on them. A call to the district can give you an idea of what is on the agenda and a few graphs — two or three — will cover you.

True, you are tipping off the opposition to the fact that the board is meeting that night, but that is of secondary importance.

What is of primary importance is the fact that you are performing a public service by telling our readers that their school board is going to meet that night.

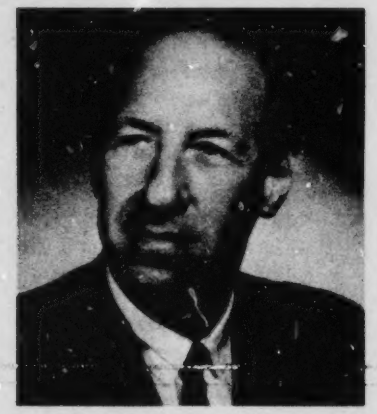
Your next obligation, of course, is to make certain we are covered on the meeting, either by telephone the next day or through live coverage.

Remember, the time you put in on routine board meetings builds the trust that leads to bigger stories.

Finally, if your school board plans a meeting on a night when you are unable to cover, be sure that your backup man/woman knows about it and is prepared to handle it.

We can give the readers of the press the most comprehensive coverage of educational matters they have ever read.

We can, that is, if we all resolve to do it.



ROBERT F. SAVITT, Ed.D., is superintendent of schools in Plainview-Old Bethpage Central School District on Long Island. He earned his doctorate from Boston University and has been superintendent at Plainview for the past 15 years. An educational innovator, Dr. Savitt has been actively involved in teacher negotiations since 1965 and has participated in a score of national and state conferences, seminars, and workshops.

Communication Procedures During Negotiations, Impasse or Strike

There are many horror stories that can be told of the unpreparedness of school districts to handle crises that develop when negotiations impasse occurs or a teachers' strike takes place. In many districts, years of excellent public relations activities have been swept away in a few short days as sharp conflicts have developed between school management and its employees.

How can such serious public relations problems be avoided? School authorities should develop an attitude assuming that impasse or strike can happen and then proceed well in advance to set up detailed plans while hoping these plans will never have to be implemented. Proper planning and effective handling of a negotiation impasse or teachers' strike not only will avoid serious problems if a work stoppage occurs, but can also be an advantage in carrying out negotiations. Because of the unpreparedness of school authorities to handle such a crises situation, teacher groups in many instances have been able to gain public support and back school boards to the wall because they have developed a very careful game plan for communicating with the public. The development of a detailed set of administrative and communication procedures set up weeks or months in advance of negotiations is the best insurance against the confusion and chaos that comes when poor communication procedures are put into effect at the last minute.

There are a number of tell-tale signs of an impending confrontation and careful notice should be taken of the progress reports distributed to the members of the negotiation team for teachers, propaganda regarding negotiations that the teacher

group may place in news releases, strike votes of employees and the establishment of a strike headquarters, honor or practice picketing, the presence of out-of-district teacher personnel in the local school district, and attempts on the part of the teacher group to build a base of support in the staff and the community.

When it is apparent that a strike is imminent, consideration must be given to the desirability of a last stand appeal to the employees. Caution must be exerted to see that this written communication is low-key and does not result in a backfire that could result in greater staff consolidation. Certainly, it is beneficial when a strike appears imminent to see that all staff members have accurate information regarding the status of negotiations and the requirement of the school district to carry out the Taylor Law provisions.

There are two kinds of planning that needs to be set in advance, one set of plans involving the manner in which the schools will be administered and the other type of planning involving communication with the various publics in the school district during the strike or confrontation.

All parties involved should know who will make the final determination if schools shall be open and it is strongly recommended that the superintendent of schools have the right of decision in this regard after considering information provided by the building administrators. A procedure should be established for announcing through the media, particularly radio and television, whether or not schools will be opened on a particular day and parents and students should be advised well in advance as to what stations to listen to in case a decision is made to close school. A detailed plan should be worked out well in advance for staffing of the schools if a strike occurs and this should take into account the anticipated number of teachers that might be out on strike and how the remaining staff members can be augmented to the extent possible by certified substitutes. Parent volunteers should be avoided unless they are certified and if at all possible, the teachers who are in should not be given such a massive added load that they might be discouraged from teaching during the strike.

Advance planning should detail certain alternate pupil schedule adjustments and programs assuming less than full staffing. Particular care must be given to the secondary schools where specialized teachers make replacement difficult.

Possible picketing problems should be reviewed and plans should be made to protect those employees coming to work recognizing their right not to strike. Operational problems should be evaluated and plans made for stockpiling essential goods and transportation services.

A specific set of procedures are required to keep strikers out of the building, to avoid disruption of classes that might be in operation. It can be anticipated that delivery trucks bringing cafeteria products into the schools might be unwilling to cross the picket line so cafeterias should be adequately stocked well in advance.

While administrative advance planning is essential, when a crises in negotiations develops, it is equally important that advance planning be carried out regarding the manner of communication during that impasse. In many school districts throughout the Country, this advance planning is not done and as a result, various administrators and members of the school board are unprepared to cope with the pressure and confusion that inevitably occurs when a strike occurs. Under such circumstances, conflicting information is provided by various board members and administrators who are interviewed by the press or television and this results in confusion and can also threaten the status of negotiations.

School officials have an obligation to keep the school community informed when a breakdown in negotiations occurs. Even though there have been a rash of teacher strikes in recent years, a possible closing of schools still is regarded as very dramatic and traumatic by the citizens in a school district. Good advance planning in communications must take into account the different publics that school management must be prepared to deal with in this situation. In addition to the teachers themselves, the school board must make plans to communicate with parents, student groups, and other employee groups to inform them of the status of negotiations and advise them of procedures regarding the operation of the schools while a strike is underway.

Plans should be made for establishment of a strike management headquarters. Experience has shown that this should not be in the central office building as that area should be kept clear for handling the day-in, day-out operational problems that still occur.

Plans should be made in advance for special switchboard service, anticipating the many calls that will be made by parents and students as to whether schools will be open or closed. It is necessary to develop a system for regular communications with building principals and with the school board. Communication with the building principals, assuming buildings are open, should take place first thing in the morning to determine the number of pupils in and any staffing or other problems. If the size of the school district allows, there should be a daily meeting in the late afternoon with all building administrators while a strike is on, reviewing problems and planning for the next day's operation. This also will provide an opportunity to inform building administrators of the status of negotiations.

A number of school districts have found it desirable to have the board meet regularly each night while a strike is underway. The board can be kept up to date on operational problems so they can make any decisions necessary regarding status of negotiations. In addition, a procedure should be set up so that the superintendent can get telephone approval from the school board on urgent decisions that might develop between board meetings.

Assuming that there will be the need for continuing contact with employees on strike, the personnel office should develop well in advance several sets of addressed envelopes so that quick mailings can be made as needed. Each building administrator, as well as central office administrators, should keep a detailed log of activities during the strike, including specifics of teachers on the picket line, etc., as this is many times required for proper implementation of the Taylor Law.

The average school district is completely unprepared for the tremendous involvement of the press and other media when a strike or confrontation occurs. A strike is important news and is extremely well covered in newspapers and on television. Press and media representatives are not prepared, nor should they be, to accept a simple "no comment". These people will get information with or without the cooperation of school officials, and hence, it is extremely important to keep an open line to the press and media during a strike crises. There should be only one spokesman for the board, either the superintendent of schools or the president of the school board. All others should refer questions to those individuals. With a strike management headquarters established, the press and others should be informed that regular press conferences would take place at a scheduled time each day and full cooperation should be extended, recognizing that the press, radio, and television do require information by certain deadline times.

Other special considerations during a strike include effectively implementing previously established plans, modifying them as required, depending on the involving

circumstances. Many strikes have been unnecessarily prolonged because the school board did not maintain effective communication directly with the leaders of the striking group while a strike was underway. There should be a "hot line" set up to assure that direct contact is continued during the strike. Experience has shown that strikes are only resolved at the bargaining table and not on the picket line. This can not be accomplished if communication is broken off between the contending parties.

A special set of procedures for communicating with all parties is necessary if a legislative hearing is held as provided under the Taylor Law. In this instance the superintendent is obviously the man in the middle as he literally must, after hearing information on all issues, come up with a recommendation for the resolution of the dispute. It is essential that both the teacher group and the school board be aware of the superintendent's requirement under the law or strained relationships will develop between the superintendent and teachers, and the superintendent and the school board.

Once the strike is resolved the superintendent, school board, and building principals play a large role in "putting the pieces of the egg" back together. The superintendent and board have the responsibility for setting a tone for staff co-operation and harmony, and the building principal must make plans to welcome the staff back and to minimize staff members who were on strike and those who worked. In carrying out this process references to the strike should be avoided; the focus should be on educational areas; there should be no toleration of reprisals or recriminations on either side and all parties should get on with the business of education.

Despite laws which prohibit strikes and despite the establishment of legislation in many states providing for handling of impasse with mediation and fact finding, teacher groups have continued to successfully employ the threat of a teachers' strike or the implementation of a strike as a lever in gaining bargaining objectives. School authorities have many times assumed that such threats would never be carried out and when a strike occurs, the pupils suffer because advance planning was not done to handle such an eventuality.

A carefully planned set of procedures for handling a teacher strike is essential if school management is to effectively operate the schools during a strike and if effective communication links are to be maintained.

Guidelines For Handling An Impasse Or Strike

Despite laws which prohibit strikes and despite the establishment of legislation providing for the handling of impasse with mediation and fact finding, teacher groups continue to successfully employ the threat of a teachers' strike or the implementation of a strike as a lever in gaining bargaining objectives or securing community support. Unfortunately school officials many times assume that such threats will never be carried out and when a strike occurs, or serious confrontation develops, pupils suffer because advance planning was not done to handle such an eventuality, and serious public relations problems develop because board and administration have not thought out in advance the many problems regarding communication that quickly evolve once confrontation occurs.

1. ATTITUDE

Assume a strike or serious impasse can happen
Set detailed plans well in advance
Brief case study of typical communication mistakes when confrontation occurs

2. TELL-TALE SIGNS OF IMPENDING STRIKE

Negotiator reports
Propaganda
Strike votes
Honor picketing
Opposition seeking a base of support in staff and community

3. LAST STAND APPEAL TO EMPLOYEES

Information relative to negotiations status and Taylor Law provisions
Caution: Backfire could result in staff consolidation

4. DETAILED PLANNING IN ADVANCE FOR STRIKE OR CONFRONTATION

Establish procedure for determining if schools shall be open and who will decide
Plan for staffing of schools:

Administrative Planning

- Estimate number of teachers that will be cut
- Secure substitute lists in advance
- Avoid parent volunteers
- Decide if teachers in will be given added load
- Plan special pupil schedule adjustments and programs with particular consideration to secondary schools
- Anticipate picketing problems and plan accordingly recognizing right of employees not to strike
- Set up procedures for keeping strikers out of buildings
- Adequately stock cafeterias

Communication Planning

- Informing community of status of negotiations
- Anticipate parent reaction and tentative plans to cope with such reaction
- Make plans for continuing contact with community during strike
- Anticipate student reaction and tentative plans to cope with such reaction
- Anticipate reaction of other employee groups and plan accordingly
- Make plans for strike management headquarters (not in superintendent's office)
- Plan for special switchboard service
- Plan system of regular communication with building principals and with board
- Prepare several sets of addressed envelopes to be sent to employees during strike
- Establish plans for keeping detailed log of activities during strike, including votes, etc.
- Establish tentative plan for keeping communication lines open to striking organizations
- Establish procedure for getting phone approval from board on urgent decisions
- Make plans for handling of press releases and dealing with media, including television

5. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS DURING STRIKE

Effectively implement previously established plans and modify as required, depending on evolving circumstances

Keep all parties involved familiar with feelers received from striking group
Deciding whether keeping schools open will affect health and safety of pupils
Providing for continuing flow of substitute teachers if initial staff dwindles
Continuing communication with strikers, organization involved, and community through correspondence, press releases, meetings, et cetera

6. CONSIDERATIONS AFTER STRIKE OR CONFRONTATION

Superintendent's and school board's role in setting tone for staff cooperation and harmony
Building principals' role in welcoming staff back and minimizing conflicts

HINTS:
Avoid reference to strike
Focus on educational areas
No toleration of reprisals, recrimination, or intimidation of nonstrikers
Get on with the business of education

Community relations consideration after strike, confrontation, or impasse

J. WILLIAM JONES is director of informational services for the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A graduate of Villanova he has worked for the *New York Times* and the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* as both a reporter and an education editor. In 1965 Mr. Jones became an information specialist for the school district. He is an author, lecturer, consultant, and contributing editor to various educational organizations.

Keeping Communications Lines Open During a Strike

There is nothing more important during a teacher strike or other emergency than good communications. Good, quick communications mean good, quick decisions, and the mechanism to keep things together during the emergency. Poor communications mean confusion, possibly chaos, and certainly a diminished position of the school board and the administration in the eyes of the media, the community, and the teachers, too.

In Philadelphia we recently experienced a three-week strike and then an eight-week strike. During the latter strike, when we kept schools open, staffed by nonstriking teachers, substitutes, and qualified parents, we had these communications needs:

— 280,000 parents wanting to know, each day, if their child's school was open, and if so what time. What about buses and lunch? Was there violence on the picket line? How many teachers were reporting for work?

— 280 principals having to make early morning decisions whether to open or close.

— Daily coverage by three newspapers, three television stations, two national wire services, three national networks in both radio and television, plus visiting reporters from various parts of the Country.

— Civic and community groups demanding daily updates on what was going on. What about negotiations? Any progress? What are the main issues?

— The city police department needing information on picket line trouble, possible violence, threats, altercations, locations where extra police were needed.

— Central office administrators needing to know which schools were in need of what kind of staff.

— The local transportation company needing daily updates on how many students were attending school and at what times.

— Combatting the unbelievable amount of rumors that were springing up throughout the city.

It was something like trying to make sense out of a United Nations picnic - during a hurricane - without an interpreter.

The answer was a total communications system utilizing telephones and walkie-talkies in a situation control room or, as the media dubbed it, the "war room".

The staff consisted of superintendent and executive deputy superintendent; associate superintendent for school operations; chief of security; legal counsel; director, office of informational services; Philadelphia city policeman; various aides.

Equipment was nine telephone lines (four unlisted numbers from our regular in-house emergency communications system; two administration building lines; two public lines; one intercom line directly to police headquarters) linking the administration building, district offices, schools, and police headquarters; two walkie-talkies, one for communications with police vehicles, the other for communication with radio-controlled school board vehicles.

The schedule:

6:00 a.m.	Activate control room
6:00 - 9:00 a.m.	Take reports from the field on problems and picket line incidents as well as a general indication of staff strength coming into the various schools; get early word of school closings and feed information to media; (Office of Informational Services serves as one big press room during these hours.)
9:00 a.m.	Conference call to all eight district superintendents at the same time; district by district count of schools to be open or closed; discussion of staff and other problems; orders for the day; update on negotiations, legal proceedings, et cetera
9:00 - 11:00 a.m.	Take care of various problems as they arise: schools being blocked; cutoff of fuel deliveries; reports of attacks on the picket lines; schools closing for lack of staff; fill out log book on every report
11:00 a.m.	Report from each district, listing exact staff size, pupil count, number of paraprofessionals, and times of operation for all 280 schools; totals added up by 12:00 noon and distributed to media

Noon - 2:00 p.m.	Plan strategies for the following day; get word out to media, principals, building administrators, school board, interested civic and community groups
2:00 p.m.	Conference call with all eight district superintendents to discuss plans, in detail, for the following day to be relayed to each school
4:00 p.m.	Deactivate control room

The benefits were numerous. They included instant communications with the media; instant verification of information or squelching of rumor; updated, validated information for school board members; top staff in decision making positions; cooperation of police department in preventing many timed, what could have been very serious picket line confrontations during a long and emotional strike; and in general the feeling that with this kind of a communications setup no problem was too big or too complex to handle, and the school board and the administration could, indeed, endure whatever obstacles the strike had to offer.

Guidelines for School Administrative Personnel In Dealing With the Press, Radio, and Television

These guidelines were prepared in an attempt to establish a healthy relationship between the school district and the communications media.

In today's world of vastly increased news emphasis on education, the people of Philadelphia, through the communications media, have become much more aware of the progress and problems of public education and more interested in becoming involved through community groups and home and school associations.

1. The School District of Philadelphia should support the public's interest in the programs and services of its public schools by making every effort to disseminate information about them.

2. It is the responsibility of the school district, through the Office of Informational Services, to facilitate this dissemination by helping qualified news media representatives secure available information as accurately, quickly, and conveniently as possible.

3. Each school administrator, a principal especially, becomes, under the news dissemination plan, an important communications link between his school and the city.

4. It is up to each administrator, then, to work with the news media in the way he believes best serves his school, the public interest and the public's right to know. Of course, there is an equal responsibility on the part of the news media representative to conduct himself in a professional manner. Any clear-cut violation of this responsibility should be reported to the Office of Informational Services.

5. No central, district, or school administrators, however, should summarily turn down a request for public information from a news media representative. The administrator may ask for time, if he feels the need to study the request or to talk to the Office of Informational Services about it, but to refuse entirely to talk with a reporter gives the news media, and eventually the public, a negative picture of the schools.

6. Clearance for administrators to talk to news media representatives IS NOT NECESSARY. In furthering the policy of cooperation between the news media and the school district, this clearance is granted to all administrators.

7. If, however, you are called for information by a news media representative and you feel you need guidance or information on the request, call the Office of Informational Services.

8. If the news request is a routine call for routine public information from someone known to you (for example, a neighborhood newspaper reporter), there probably will be no need to call informational services. The call usually would be necessary only if you feel the subject has broad implications and you need guidance in handling it.

9. One of the primary responsibilities of the Office of Informational Services is to give guidance to school personnel in dealing with communications media. It is NOT the duty of the office to give permission to talk to news media representatives for, under Guideline No. 6 above, administrators already have, and are expected to use, this right.

10. Some of the typical situations when principals might want to obtain guidance from the Office of Informational Services include requests for interviewing pupils or teachers, taking pictures inside school buildings, or situations involving possible legal consequences like fires, accidents, personal injury, juvenile delinquency, and student unrest.

When in doubt about the application of the above guidelines, please do not hesitate to call the Office of Informational Services.

R. SEYMOUR SMITH is director of information services and development at Niagara Falls Medical Center. A graduate of the Glassboro (New Jersey) State master's program in educational information service, He has worked as a reporter, editor, columnist, and radio programmer. Mr. Smith was coordinator of community relations at Williamsville Central School for three years where he developed a multi-media information system.

Preparing For Crisis Communications With the News Media

Introducation

In the midst of crisis, school boards immediately wish that they had a more favorable working relationship with the news media.

Whether it be a crisis regarding negotiations, a racial incident, a possible act of violence, an unfavorable release of standardized test scores or even an outbreak of lice in the school district, the fact remains that the school board often needs to rely on a working relationship with the news media to interpret its "side of the story".

Unfortunately, the working relationship that the schools seek is not made in the midst of crisis. It must be established and continually fostered before the pressure is on.

School boards and school districts must develop more effective means of cementing relationships with representatives of the news media without the burden of butting heads in the midst of a crisis.

The following material may provide some thoughts on how this relationship can be established and continually fostered.

The Power of the News Media

Leslie W. Kindred, in his text School Public Relations[1], and Donald Bagin, et al., in their comprehensive handbook School Communications Ideas that Work[2], place a high emphasis on the value of the news media as a school communications source. Mr. Bagin, et al., states:

> "The importance of local newspapers should not be underestimated. Surveys indicate that about 50 percent of those interviewed select the newspaper as the primary source of information about local schools."[3]

All schoolmen and school board members have had numerous opportunities to realize the power of the press. This reality often comes at a time of crisis and often when they are totally unprepared for the news that is being conveyed to their school publics.

There is too, another, more subtle reality of school relationships with the press that is most distressing. Some schoolmen and some board members have a deep seeded attitude that almost suggests a bit of paranoia — "That reporter is out to get us".

The vast majority of the working press is not out to get anyone. Quite to the contrary. Like Ivory Snow, 99 and 44 1/100th percent of the members of the press are most objective in their role of "reporting the news".

Jack L. Davidson, in his text Effective School Board Meetings, clarifies the role of the news media when he states, "... reporting the news is their major responsibility and they are indoctrinated with the necessity of objective reporting throughout their training and experience"[4].

He further clarifies the administrators' and board member's need to understand this role: "When ... (we) realize this fact, and accept the primary role of the media (we) can deal more realistically with the problems of communication."[5]

Establishing Favorable Relationships With the Media

Like any other area of school management, news relations must be based on policy. If your school board does not now have a policy regarding its relationships with the media, you should consider its immediate formulation and adoption.

---

[1]Kindred, Leslie W., School Public Relations, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1957

[2]Bagin, Donald; Grazian, Frank; and Harrison, Charles, School Communications Ideas that Work, A Public Relations Handbook for School Officials, Nation's Schools Press, McGraw-Hill, Chicago, 1972

[3]Ibid., p. 90

[4]Davidson, Jack L., Effective School Board Meetings, Parker Publishing Company, Inc., West Nyack, New York, 1970, p. 98

[5]Ibid.

The New York State School Boards Association's publication A Public Relations Handbook[6], and Leslie Kindred's text lists suggested news policy positions for you to consider.

Mr. Kindred lists five basic points for a policy and concludes with a major suggestion that relates to our topic at hand:

> "Friendly and impartial relations shall be carried on with the press, and at no time shall school officials suppress information or engage in practices which are contrary to the best interest of the institution."[7]

Once a guiding policy has been adopted by a school board, the road ahead to establishing favorable relationships with the news media is marked by a clear definition of the responsibilities for liaison with the media, the school's willingness to exercise honesty and candor, understanding of the needs and role of the media in a school communications program, and the exercise of some basic good human relations.

Honesty and Candor

Any good relationship is based on honesty. A school's willingness to be honest and candid with media representatives will pay great dividends in a crisis situation.

We do not believe any school board or school district representative has ever proclaimed a policy of dishonesty with media people. Often, the sin of omission is tantamount to dishonesty. ("I didn't lie to him, I just didn't tell him the 'real' story.")

Within reason, (exceptions are when personalities are involved, confidentiality must be honored, or when economic specualtion could be a factor) it is always best to be honest and fully cooperative with the members of the working press.

Establishing a relationship based on honesty and candor gains credibility and faith with media representatives that when the school board takes a position in a crisis, it is one founded on a past record of sincere commitment.

Definition of Responsibilities

School boards and school administrators must establish clear definitions of who is responsible for continual liaison with the news media.

Most schools properly delegate this responsibility to the chief school officers. Boards must also remind their membership that the superintendent of schools speaks for the school district. (He should also convey factual information and interpret policy for the community and school staff.)

The chairman or president of the board speaks for the school board. Individuals within the school district may speak for segments of the school community (e.g., a principal speaks for his school).

---

[6]A Public Relations Handbook for School Boards, New York State School Boards Association, Inc., Albany, 1968, soon to be reissued

[7]Kindred, Leslie W., School Public Relations, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1957

As simple as this clear definition of responsibility may seem, many problems with news relations originate from a lack of the basic understanding of that procedure.

While school board members should never forfeit their right to speak as individuals, they must never speak "for the board" unless empowered to do so by the board collectively or the board's elected leader.

The board chairman also, during his term of office, must sacrifice some of his individual liberty in "speaking for the board". While a resolution may be passed six to one, with the board chairman casting the lone nay ballot, he has the responsibility to speak "for the board" on the issue and not confuse his personal position with the board's majority position.

When seven individual board members conduct seven different news relations programs, during a crisis, there is bound to be trouble. It is best to clarify the board's position well ahead of crisis and once the position is clarified, all members of the board should honor the position.

Knowing the Media Needs

Media people, from the weekly editor to the television newsman, have similar needs when it comes to handling school news.

The most basic need is having a person they can contact when hot news breaks and someone they can rely upon when a crisis breaks.

The chief school officer must take the initiative to establish a close working relationship with media representatives. (Large school districts may charge an information officer with this responsibility.)

It is important that the chief school officer have a list of all weekly and daily newspaper editors and radio and television news directors, with their telephone numbers, at his disposal at all times.

It is even more important that media representatives be given the names of school contacts that are available to them at all times. This can be done by dropping the editors and news directors a note and giving them a contact card for their file that would include day and night telephone numbers of the school representatives. Such a contact card might read:

SMARTSMORE SCHOOL DISTRICT
122 John Dewey Drive, Modern Math, Michigan
NEWS CONTACT CARD

In case of an emergency or the need for immediate news contact, regarding the Smartsmore School District, contact:

	Office	Home
1. John Glutz, Superintendent	881-3456	881-6557
2. Stanley Gish, Asst. Supt.	881-3457	881-6664
3. Dot Single, Curriculum Dir.	881-3459	881-4392

This simple news contact card pays big dividends for your district's news relations in a crisis situation. Unless you live in a small town serviced only by a weekly newspaper, it is important that newsmen know who they can reach for crisis information around the clock. The absence of an available "responsible spokesman" for the school

district, leads many newsmen to another less responsible spokesman. (That could be anyone from a student to a bus driver or from a teachers association spokesman to a school secretary.)

Schoolmen need to have a better understanding of the particular problems of the news media. The news contact list suggested (with names of all editors and news directors) should include deadline hours for weekly and daily newspapers. A small item such as not returning a newsman's call before deadline results in comments in print that read "the superintendent was unavailable for comment".

There are a number of unmet needs regarding the school board meeting. Generally, school boards are not swamped with newsmen for monthly or twice monthly public sessions, but when a crisis hits the street, chances are boards are unprepared for the presence of media representatives.

Here, again, before a crisis, meeting procedures to accommodate the working press should become standard operating practices for all board meetings. We suggest you consider the following as a checklist for accommodating the media people at your board meetings.

1. Be sure an advance agenda is always sent to news representatives for all board meetings.

2. Provide a press table at your board meeting for members of the press.

3. Whenever possible, have background packets available to newsmen at the meeting so that they may better follow the agenda.

4. If possible, have a responsible administrator sitting at the press table to answer any immediate questions that they may have (e.g., who is that man in the white hat?)

5. The board president and/or the chief administrative officers should be available after the meeting to answer questions.

(These suggestions are based on the author's experiences of having attended over 60 school board meetings in ten months as a reporter.)

Good Human Relations

Good news relations, an important key to crisis communications, is nothing more than good human relations. Treating newsmen as individuals and creating trust between the schools and the representatives of the news media can only be advantageous and in the best interest of public education.

School boards and administrators need to place a higher priority on their human relations with the media. Accommodating newsmen at board meetings, assisting them in developing news stories about the schools and relying on their integrity as professional communicators is the raw ingredient of a good working relationship between the schools and the press, with or without a crisis.

This relationship is refined by the free exchange of continuous information between the schools and the media. Based on such a relationship, the problems of crisis communication become much more manageable.

Communicating in a Crisis

With the foundation of a good working relationship established between the media and the schools (as outlined in the above material), the particular problems of crisis communication become surmountable.

The most important decision schools must make regarding crisis communication is whether they will play an offensive or defensive role. With the offensive role, the schools take the initiative, provide the leadership and attempt to lead the crisis in an objective direction.

In the defensive role, the schools have a number of choices: (1) Hope no one hears about the crisis; (2) be reluctant to participate in it and hope the issue dies; (3) don't say anything unless they want to correct a fact; or (4) all of the above.

As obvious as the choice may be, many schools select the defensive role and have to play "catch-up ball". Whether it is founded on ignorance, fear of the media or the lack of faith in their ability to communicate effectively, the results are similar — disaster.

With the offensive choice, the schools are in a better position to convey factual information, clarify the issues, and lead the crisis dialogue. Controversy and its accompanying crises is not all bad, it can provide communities and schools with an opportunity to exchange views, resolve issues openly and possibly be stronger because of the controversy.

In a typical crisis, we would recommend that the schools take the initiative and, both with the news media and its individual publics, use candor and honesty to convey its viewpoint.

Assuming a crisis hits your community, you might attempt the following.

1. Go to the media before they come to you. *("We have had a racial incident at Archie Bunker High School. We don't know all the facts yet, but we understand that 200 Irish students have walked out and are picketing in front of the building. Superintendent Godspell will release a statement at 11:00 a.m. — two hours from now — regarding the situation".)

2. Carefully gather the facts, and prepare a written "fact sheet" of what has happened for distribution to the media at the 11:00 a.m. meeting.

3. Any statement issued by the schools should reflect the facts and a possible solution for the issue.

4. The school spokesman should be available for comments throughout the controversy and, unless the board or school administration, has taken a definitive position, confine all comments to the facts of the issue.

*School administrators should notify their board members and staff of the crisis, before they hear it on the radio or read it in the newspaper.

Communications during crisis must be based on judgment. What you should say or not say would be judgmental decisions and more than likely different with every situation and with every community.

There is no "one way" to handle crisis communications with the media.

The pre-crisis work you do with your media representatives will, by a large measure, determine how effectively you can communicate with them, and, ergo, your community.

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of establishing and maintaining the machinery of crisis communication before the crisis itself is the issue.

CHECK LIST

Before a Crisis

___ Have a well defined crisis communication plan, with channels of responsibility clearly stated.

___ Be sure media people know the district spokesperson and the district should know the news representatives.

___ A well established reputation for dealing honestly and fairly with the media pays big dividends in a crisis.

___ Your crisis plan should have an information gathering network and a central collection point.

During a Crisis

___ Gather facts, prepare materials and TAKE the initiative with media representatives (you have a greater credibility by going to them rather than waiting for them to come to you).

___ Don't take a definite position on an issue until facts are all collected, in the meantime, be willing to share information.

___ Be willing to admit you don't have all the answers but are committed to work for the solutions.

___ Any released statements (for newspapers, radio, or television) should be written and then carefully read in an interview. An impromptu, ad lib, comment to a newsman can be most embarrassing.

___ Avoid getting emotionally involved in the crisis issue, contain yourself to the facts and policy.

___ Leave the prognostication of the issue to others.

After the Crisis

___ Evaluate your crisis communication plan with staff, board, and news representatives and make needed changes.

___ Extend thanks to news representatives for their cooperation during the crisis (however, don't publically rap media people, whom you felt put the screws to you).

___ Get some rest, have a few drinks and get ready to go around again.

FACULTY

Martin Buskin, Education Editor
Newsday, Garden City, New York

J. William Jones, Director of Informational Services
School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jerome G. Kovalcik, Assistant Superintendent
New York City Schools, Brooklyn, New York

David G. Rossie, Education Editor
Binghamton Evening Press, Binghamton, New York

Dr. Robert F. Savitt, Superintendent
Plainview Central Schools, Plainview, New York

R. Seymour Smith, Director, Information Services and Development
Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, Niagara Falls, New York

CLINIC DIRECTOR
George E. Lowe, Director of Public Relations
New York State School Boards Association, Inc.
Albany, New York